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### **Sarasota County Commission may revisit phosphate suit**

ENGLEWOOD -- With the Peace River/Manasota Regional Water Supply Authority Board declining to take action Wednesday, Sarasota County commissioners may revisit the issue of phosphate mining.

Last month, commissioners declined to intervene in a proceeding filed by Charlotte County for an administrative hearing with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection challenging the plans of DEP to issue a permit to expand the Four Corners phosphate mine in Manatee County by 2,500 acres.

Instead, commissioners directed their representative to the authority board, Commissioner Shannon Staub, to seek intervention in the proceedings through the water authority, where commissioners felt they could more directly determine the harm to Sarasota County.

Speaking to the Southwest County Alliance of Homeowners Associations Thursday at Park Forest, Commissioner Nora Patterson suggested the commission might find it necessary to file a brief in the proceedings since the authority board failed to act on the issue Wednesday.

Staub raised the issue, but commissioners from DeSoto and Manatee counties requested a one-month delay to consult with their boards before taking action. Charlotte County Commission Chairman Adam Cummings agreed with Staub that something must be done concerning phosphate mining projects.

"We were told that it would be enormously expensive and it was probably too late to file anyway," Patterson said. "But now we might look at filing an amicus (friend of the court) brief."

Although the commission does not have phosphate mining on its agenda for Tuesday's meeting, Patterson said the issue was likely to arise when Staub reports on the meeting.

Besides seeking intervention through the water authority board, Patterson told alliance members her board had also sent letters to various federal and state authorities, included Florida Department of Environmental Protection Secretary David Struhs, supporting the idea of an environmental impact study of phosphate mining by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"We need to look at the whole cumulative effect on the Peace River and



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Charlotte Harbor," Patterson said. "Taken individually, they look permissible if you just look at the flows in the Peace River. But they have an enormous impact if you look at them cumulatively."

Patterson said it was important for Sarasota County to be involved in the process because of the importance of the Peace River as a future water source for the county.

"We have to show that we are at least of the same opinion as Charlotte County," Patterson said.

Alliance vice president Dan Cockrell, the former owner of a company that serviced the needs of the phosphate industry, said after Patterson spoke that the phosphate issue was being "overblown."

"There are two sides to the question," Cockrell said, mentioning the high-paying jobs the industry provided. "They've cleaned up their act tremendously. They're trying to be good neighbors."